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Training, Networking Events Bolster Iraqi Businesses, Businesswomen

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BAGHDAD, Iraq – Training and networking provided by U.S. reconstruction organizations are meant to provide guidance for Iraqis applying for business contracts with Coalition Forces, but their events secondary purpose has a much longer lasting effect...empowering Iraqi businesswomen to take part in the rebuilding of their economy and country.

Several contract training and networking events hosted by the Gulf Region Division and the Joint Contracting Command Iraq/Afghanistan have been held recently in the International Zone here.

While these events have been open to all Iraqi business leaders, additional networking opportunities were made available by Azza Humadi, project manager for the GRD's Women's Advocate Initiative.

Humadi, an Iraqi/American is a contractor with Stanley Baker and Hill has organized and managed these types of events for several years while working in Iraq for the GRD. "I want to give back to my country and help to empower the strong women of Iraq so they may shine brightly in a new Iraq," she said.

More than 40 companies were represented at a recent meeting in July; 10 were female owned.

"Many of the women of Iraq are widows or single young women who need to be

able to take care of themselves now and in the future," Humadi said. "Being financially independent and having a good business sense improve standards of living and provide for a better life."

Several Iraqi businessmen attended the July meeting and they pointed out, "there is not much difference between a woman and man" with regard to operating a business. Some women "have shown excellent talents" and are respected "because they are good leaders regardless of being man or woman."

"It also is a critical component to the successful rebuilding of the economy and country," she said. "We need all Iraqis to work towards this goal in every way they can – men and women."

Humadi is not the only person giving advice and information on successfully applying for contracts. She is joined by several members of the Joint Contracting Command Iraq/Afghanistan who explain the proper way to complete the complex forms to Iraqis in attendance such as Host Nation Business Advisors.

"You have to look at the way Americans and Iraqis do business. Each has been successfully doing business their own way for centuries," said Air Force Staff Sgt. Adam Crockett, JCCI/A.

Nadia, an Iraqi businesswoman said "I

come here to get to know the people who review the paperwork and offer solicitation. I come to get my company an opportunity at working with the Coalition or Government of Iraq. My country needs these kinds of meetings and contracts."

Thikra, another successful Iraqi businesswoman who attended a recent networking event said "it was an event just like this one that got me started with my business. An American civilian from the contracting office took the time to show me the proper procedures of filling out what then looked like complex paperwork."

"Now, I am a successful businesswoman with international partners. I provide my company's services and products to those who are making a positive difference in our country," Thikra said.

Each of the training and information events has been filled to capacity despite the threat level and challenge of accessing the International Zone.

"All of the people who attend are clearly applying, or want to work with the U.S. and Coalition Forces, even during this time of threats and violence against those who work with Americans and their allies," Humadi said. "This is a great message to the world. Also, it is clearly noticed that they would rather work with the Coalition partners because they know they'll be paid for their work."

At all of the events the important networking and communicating that follows the briefings always lasts far beyond the schedule times.

"People enjoy sharing ideas and seeing how they can work with others to make their companies stronger," Humadi said. "Strong women build strong nations."

Luma, an Iraqi businesswoman, said "Women are a part of this society and together everyone who had an unfair chance during the last regime can now take advantage of their new opportunities within our new country."

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